

It was about a week later  
when the gentlemen came from the firingsquad  
of course I came away quietly  
to here

Now I fully agree with them  
a man must learn to die with dignity  
and though they've a cruel job I see them  
as essentially honorable men

And they've given me the time in this place  
to work it all out in my head  
and make peace with my past

### Babysitter

man he says I always did  
want to meet one of you college dudes  
then horse lids his eyes and he puts his head  
back on the top of the chair  
the cigaret lolls in his mouth

he is 18 but looks 25  
he has been in and out  
of various joints since age 13  
first time he eyeballed my books  
as if they represented the ultimate heist  
he is one of Blithering Jack's boys  
quite paranoid and a potential danger  
sometimes Jack drops him by  
when the heat's after him  
or he thinks they are

asleep he turns his head  
and the cigaret begins to burn  
the left shoulder of his shirt  
the smoldering fire moves  
like a slow eruption of acid  
in a vial of very pure water  
he has a tattoo that is  
being progressively revealed  
as the shirtsleeve crumbles away  
and I watch wondering what it is

he wakes with a rising slapping  
motion and gets things under control  
then he looks at me and I  
walk over pretending  
I had fallen asleep too  
there is a terrible angry black skull  
perched on angry crab-colored flesh  
with a turquoise inscription below  
which reads DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR

and I have to admit to  
feeling a certain envy of him  
having no such succinct code to live by  
I bring him a damp cloth for his arm  
and he lights another cigaret  
after awhile Blithering Jack comes back  
as usual he gives me some things for  
babysitting his boy then they leave

La Cienega, 1957

## L'ENFANCE D'UN CHEF

Sandoz worked the west 40 too  
he was made to carry the bull food in a quiver  
he found it cumbersome but continued  
he liked to watch the sun's progress during the course of  
a day  
& to rehearse the songs he had learned as a boy

The massa had his own skeetshooting trap  
on a handsome rocky point overlooking a bend of the river  
it was up behind the large and spacious ranch house  
his foreman was 84 years old and nearly blind  
he got young girls from the town and screwed them  
in the pinons all over the ranch  
Sandoz heard Slim had to go to the doctor a lot

Sandoz worried an awful lot about the twin villages  
down in the valley west of the ranch  
there was one wagon track that went in there  
one year it got washed out it was never replaced  
Sandoz worried about those people as he rode along  
he wondered could they grow enuff food  
& what would they do if their crops failed  
times like that he did not feel like singing

The ruins of an ancient pueblo  
stood in an almost hidden corner of the ranch  
when he felt blue Sandoz would go sit in the kiva  
or that dark room that had been their kiva  
it was a gloomy place that smelled bad  
but Sandoz didn't mind the odors  
nor the condoms left there by the boys from the town  
it was a good place to shelter from the rain  
he could hear the scream in nearby arroyos  
always here rain meant flash floods  
and maybe stock would be drowned

He sat and listened  
he sat & looked at the crumbling walls  
in the dim light till his eye sockets hurt